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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical analysis of the role of the Tanzanian education system in enhancing young children's awareness of economic aspects around them. The major factors the paper considers are: the poverty of the country; the prominence of the education system as a socializing agent for children; the aim of early education in Tanzania; and young children's experiences of economic nature within their environments. Analysis reveals that young children in Tanzania encounter various aspects of economic nature at home, at school, and in their communities on a daily basis. Findings suggest that since the education system is the major vehicle for children's socialization outside the home and since formal learning takes place mostly in school, economic awareness can be enhanced within the school system. The paper proposes some strategies for enhancing young children's awareness of the economic world around them. The strategies are: developing a culture for trade, reexamining gender roles, examining economic barriers facing children, and incorporating some aspects of foreign trade in children's daily activities. Contains 11 references. (Author/BT)

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PREPARING TANZANIA'S YOUNG CHILDREN FOR THE ECONOMIC WORLD: POSSIBILITIES FOR COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

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Summer 1999

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of the role of the Tanzanian education system in enhancing young children's awareness of economic aspects around them. The major factors considered are: the poverty of the country, the prominence of the education system as a socializing agent for children, the aim of early education in Tanzania, and young children's experiences of economic nature within their environments. The analysis reveals that young children in Tanzania encounter various aspects of economic nature at home, at school and in their communities on a daily basis. Since the education system is the major vehicle for children's socialization outside the home, and since formal learning takes place mostly in school it is claimed that economic awareness can be enhanced within the school system.

The paper proposes some strategies for enhancing young children's awareness of the economic world around them. The strategies are: developing a culture for trade, re-examining gender roles, examining economic barriers facing children and incorporating some aspects of foreign trade in children's daily activities.

1. Introduction

Child development theorists emphasize physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth of children. Although different theorists focus on different aspects of development, the importance of development of the whole child cannot be overemphasized. The famous child psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, focusing on cognitive development of children, highlight children's ability to construct their own knowledge. In order to construct their own knowledge, children need to be given opportunities to interact with their environment and make sense of those interactions. The more a child is exposed to rich, interactive environments, the more the child's brain is challenged. Highly challenged brains become more active than less challenged brains (Trawik-Smith, 1997). The role of parents and teachers is to provide conducive environments for children to interact with, and monitor how the children make sense of those environments.

Many adults may not be aware that children construct their own understanding of their environments, and that they make different meanings from their interaction with phenomena. Adults may tend to try, often unsuccessfully, to encourage children to perceive their environment from adults' perspectives. Adults need to understand children from the children's own perspectives. To understand children, adults need to listen to them and be aware of their day to day experiences at home, in the community and at school, and also what meanings they draw from those experiences. Lack of this awareness makes parents and teachers expect children to learn and see things the same way adults see them.

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Family background and earlier experiences are among the factors that influence how a child reacts to the immediate environment he/she interacts with. The quantitative and qualitative changes that take place in the child need to be nurtured in ways that allow the child to develop to full potential mentally, in physical growth, socially, and emotionally. Children's experiences are the means for understanding the world around them. Adults' understanding of children's interpretation of those experiences helps provide direction for meaningful learning and better understanding of their environment.

This paper analyzes the role of the Tanzanian school system in enhancing young children's understanding of the economic world around them The children's economic world includes day-to-day buying and selling of items at home, in the community and even at school. This role is examined in light of the overall welfare of the country. As a poor country, Tanzania has little to offer outside the formal education system to help young children in their struggle to acquire meaningful learning in organized monitored ways. As such, the education system is the most likely vehicle for ensuring children's learning is as complete, and as meaningful as possible.

The paper first provides the conceptual framework, and addresses the question as to how early education in Tanzania prepares young children for the economic world around them. Other sections of the paper examine family transformations and economic activities, ways in which the children can be helped to start making sense of the economic world around them, and strategies for collaborating with other countries.

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2. Conceptual Framework

Although there has been criticism of World Bank's ranking of Tanzania as the second poorest country (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa, 1990), living experiences in Tanzania reveal pockets of serious poverty around the country, both in rural and urban areas. Tanzanians are aware of poor living conditions. They compare wealth within families, availability and standard of social services, and they know the welfare of Tanzania is not high. However, even with poor living conditions, some aspects of the education sector have been remarkably efficient. For example, in the middle of a declining welfare, literacy levels rose from 10% to 90% in the first two decades of independence (Bagachwa et al, 1995). The education system is facing problems such as scarcity of materials and high pupil-teacher ratios. In Shinyanga and Dar es Salaam regions for example, the pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools are 52:1 and 44: 1 respectively (The Ministry of Education, 1999). Despite these problems, the education system is the major vehicle for socialization of children in Tanzania.

Partially due to a small economy of the country, Tanzanian children have only the education system to look up to, for successful adult life. Business-based socialization facilities, recreational areas, or other social services for children are minimal or lacking. Ironically, the competitive nature of the education pyramid makes it impossible for all aspiring children to make it through the education system in order to achieve a reasonably comfortable life in adulthood. The formerly elitist education system has a rigid structure through which every child has to navigate. The structure is reflected in national

syllabuses and common content, but also allows for some flexibility at the level of classroom interaction. The urge to succeed through the education system makes it necessary for children to spend as much time and effort as it is possible, learning what they are expected of in the school system. Since school learning is a major part of a Tanzanian child's experiences, learning outside the school system is likely to be considered of less importance. School learning and everyday life experiences especially for young children have not been adequately intertwined. Learning outside the school setting is considered secondary or unimportant. Young children have natural curiosity that helps them learn fast and meaningfully, if care is taken to direct their learning towards the aims of their education. This potential needs to be utilized by enhancing the child's experiences from the home and community environments as well as from the school setting.

The aim of early childhood education worldwide is to maximize young children's opportunities to develop physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. Tanzania in particular, has clearly stated objectives of early education (Elimu ya Awali). The objectives are (Wizara ya Elimu, 1990):

a. learning about the environment through play and other means
b. developing language ability
c. learning how to solve problems
d. learning different skills
e. learning about, and valuing, one's own culture
f. learning good values/morals

At the syllabus level, these objectives are translated into various specific activities for children. These include very specific activities in the areas of health, language, play/games, music, art, math/counting, science and good conduct. Instructional objectives, teaching strategies, materials and references are provided (Wizara ya Elimu na Utamaduni, 1991). In theory, the education system is the major mechanism for holistic nurturing of the young child. In practice however, children's experiences including economic interactions remain to be incorporated.

3. How Does Early Education in Tanzania Prepare Children for the Economic World Around Them?

The economic component is almost entirely missing in the "Elimu ya Awali" syllabus. The closest activities to economic aspects of the children's day to day life include mere recognition of coin money and paper money, using money and role playing shopkeeper. This is unrealistic because the children come from households where economic problems are faced and solved every day. Excluding the economic aspects from the syllabus downplays their role and importance in the children's daily lives. The more the economic aspects are removed from the children's school experiences, the more the children will tend to consider them as distant, artificial, and unimportant. Learning economics later along the schooling ladder will only place it among the abstract concepts learned in school for passing examinations, rather than a reality to be incorporated in every day interactions at home and in the community.

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4. Family Transformations and Economic Activities

In Tanzania, poverty is the reality of many households, especially in rural areas. This causes urban migration and disturbs the traditional extended family and its support networks in rural areas. Over 59% of the farmers are poor and about 85% of the poor people are in rural areas (Wangwe and Bagachwa, 1994). Migration into the cities, coupled with natural population increase makes life difficult in urban households. In the cities, the extended family is less likely to hold together due to economic reasons. Therefore household survival activities focus on the nuclear family. Some authors have referred to this concept as "Westernization of the African family" (Prosper, 1999). Increased single parenthood is another way the traditional father-mother family is being transformed. Many young unmarried mothers find themselves as heads of households with no monthly or annual income. Buying and selling of petty articles and food items becomes the major means for daily survival of the family. A child may be waking up every morning at about five o'clock to help the mother with making "vitumbua", selling "maandazi" or to pick vegetables which must be sold fresh by day break. By the time the child settles in school for the morning session he/she has completed the economic transactions necessary for the family's survival for that day.

Paid child labor outside the home is another possibility. There is a strong relationship between family poverty and child labor (Prosper, 1999). A study conducted on street kids in Dar es Salaam by Prosper (1999) revealed that:

> Most children of school going age had dropped out or had not been registered in school due to lack of school fees, uniforms and other school requirements. Even for those schooling, needed some hours

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> or days working so as to get money for such school requirements. Also, due to poverty, child labor was needed to supplement family income (page 47).

It is obvious that economic endeavors are part and parcel of young children's lives at home. Unfortunately, the child has no place to share, or learn more about, these experiences which have not found their way into the classroom. The school curriculum is packed with other types of content. Therefore the practical, household economic experiences that may even threaten the child's school attendance remain the child's secret world.

5. How Can Tanzania Prepare Its Young Children for the Economic World?

(a) Developing a Trade Culture

Children need to link household petty businesses with school learning. School is a place where children formalize their thinking. They can make connected sense of the disjointed activities they help carry out in the family and in the community without giving them serious thought. Mere realization that buying and selling (or producing and selling) is trade, and knowing that to make a profit one has to sell at a price higher than the cost of buying or cost of production, will enable young children to make better sense of their petty economic activities at home. Trade (internal and external) is an engine of economic growth in Tanzania (Mbogoro, 1994). Developing a trade culture in early childhood as part of everyday life will enable children to see some relevance in, and begin to relate to, businesses around them and later the world economy and how it affects them. Economics as a classroom subject is not taught in Tanzania in any form in the primary years. When it

is first introduced at secondary school level it is studied as an abstract academic topic removed from reality. It needs to be rooted into children's life experiences from an early age, as it relates to their daily experiences.

(b) Re-examining Traditional Gender Roles

In the effort to prepare Tanzania's young children to face the economic world, traditional gender roles must be re-considered in the light of changing family structures. In the traditional African family before the influence of industrialization in Europe gender roles were organized very differently from what we see today. The head of the family in most cases was male. In Kilimanjaro for example, this would be the father/husband; and in the absence of the father, his son would take over if he was old enough, and if the children were still young, the husband's brother would head the family. The immediate family (nuclear family) was seen as part of the extended family. The importance of the extended family was emphasized at all levels. A formal meal or feast where a goat or cow was slaughtered was always targeted at the extended family.

There was a close link between the extended family and gender roles. Socially the women and girls were one group, and the men and boys another group, the superior one. Women and girls had no legal ownership of property like coffee farms, livestock, houses, or businesses. However, men were obliged to "provide for the women". An unmarried woman in Kilimanjaro for example, continued to be the responsibility of her father; and when the father was not there she became the responsibility of her brother(s).

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Women and girls worked harder than men and boys. They worked long hours on farms, they fetched food for animals, they took care of young children and did all the house work including fetching firewood and water, cooking, and washing. The concept of housewife did not exist in Kilimanjaro, since women worked outside the home for long hours. The men supervised farm work once in a while, sprayed coffee plants, built houses once in many years, irrigated farms occasionally, and socialized with other men most of the time.

Women and girls had little control over what was produced from their own labor. On top of doing most of the farm work, the women, assisted by their daughters, would carry big loads of bananas on their heads to sell at the market and bring the money to their husbands. Sometimes they would spend a little portion of the money to buy some necessities for the family. It was not unusual for women to be beaten up by their husbands because they did not bring home all the money obtained from selling bananas. During the season of selling coffee, the women (and children) would carry loads of coffee on their heads to the buying agent, while the father followed behind at a short distance, walking with leisure, carrying nothing. When it was time to get the money from the cashier, the father would surface quickly and proudly to receive the money!

In some households however, money obtained from selling bananas belonged to the wife for domestic use, while money obtained from selling coffee and other cash crops, which was a lot more, belonged to the husband. The husband would then use the money for

paying school fees, buying clothes especially at Christmas time, and for building or doing major repairs.

All in all, women were backstage players while the wealth produced belonged to the men. Boys grew up not learning anything about cooking or washing, since "their future wives would play those roles". This situation was not very different among other cultural groups in Tanzania.

Due to the process of industrialization in Europe, search for cheap labor in African countries changed the life styles of many cultural groups. Gender roles started changing slowly. Men and women now worked in factories and women for the first time had their personal monthly income that did not have to go through their husbands. Some young women preferred working in cities rather than living in the rural areas, get married and "work for husbands". Men and women who moved to cities and could not get employment engaged in petty businesses for survival. Currently, the number of women who support themselves economically and who are heads of households is on the increase.

Couples working in cities find themselves crossing gender role barriers in order to survive economically. The socialization of girls as just wives and mothers to be is less realistic now due to economic hardships. Young men who grow up within the socialization of traditional gender roles find themselves forced to learn the first thing

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about cooking at about 25 years of age when they realize their monthly salary would not last a week if they ate in hotels!

Preparation of young boys and girls for economic survival needs to take the lead. Marriage and motherhood should not replace economic capability. Young boys and girls are becoming increasingly aware of this reality. The emerging awareness has to be tapped and enhanced by the school process starting at an early age. Children need to be given opportunities to fantasize about holding important jobs, owning big businesses, trading with other countries etc., irrespective of gender. Reading books or drawing pictures that portray men as bread earners and women as housewives is lying to the young children.

(c) Highlighting Economic Barriers Facing Children in Their Daily Lives

Young children in Tanzania are aware that their school uniform, school bags (backpack), pens, pencils, toys, etc, cost money, and that their parents pay for those things. Mere classroom discussion about how much these things cost, who buys them and how the money is obtained will raise the children's awareness about buying and selling. Talking about money available and the things they desire to buy will highlight the concept of budget, choice, and self-discipline in spending money. In addition, talking about their future dreams of success and how to achieve them will help strengthen their aspirations early in life. Mushi (1999) found that 86% of the Tanzanian young children who had come to Canada and the United States had dreams of success before they left the country.

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(d) Incorporating Some Aspects of Foreign Trade Into Young Children's Activities

Talking about imported goods within the classroom environment, their prices, why countries import goods, how they are paid for, what products Tanzania exports to other countries, and how exports help the economy, will give children a sense of economic connection to the outside world. Children will start developing a sense of belonging within the global economy. Given the economic liberalization in Tanzania today, young children interact with foreign goods at home, at school and in the community. Tham (1993) points out that liberalization has been beneficial to Tanzanian women and the poor in particular.

6. Collaboration with Other Countries

It takes the global village to raise a 21st century child. Economic situations, wars, famine, diseases or discoveries in one part of the world inevitably affect other parts of the world. The wars in Rwanda and Kosovo left countless children as orphans, at the mercy of other countries. Famine in Ethiopia has caught the attention of other countries for a long time. Ease of communication and information technology advancement makes it possible for children in Tanzania to be aware of things taking place all over the world as they happen. Country boundaries are becoming more and more unrealistic in terms of socialization, mobility and other ways of interaction. It is time to introduce children to the economic interactions between countries.

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Recommendations on Some Practical Strategies:

The following are some practical strategies to initiate collaboration with other countries in raising young children's awareness of the economic world:

(a) Listsérvs for early childhood education (ECED) professionals

(b) Common websites for sharing economic and cultural information

(c) Exchange visits

- personal level
- school level
- state/region/national level

(d) Scholarships - to facilitate experience in different ECED programs and activities

(e) Trade: between-countries buying and selling of cultural artifacts made by children

(f) Lobbying governments for financial support where appropriate.

Concluding Remarks

This paper examines the role of the education system as the major means for socializing young children in Tanzania. It advocates for incorporation of children's economic encounters at home and in their communities into their school curriculum since other means of helping children make sense of their experiences outside the school setting are limited. The economic world permeates children's lives as they interact with foreign items within their surrounding on a day-to-day basis. Developing a culture for trade, re-

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examining gender roles, examining economic barriers facing children and incorporating some aspects of foreign trade in children's activities are considered useful strategies to enhance children's interpretation of their economic world.

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